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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the recruitment and retention of international students for study in academic programs in the United States from the point of view of how institutions of higher education can best plan and implement such programs. The paper opens by defining international students as foreign students who seek their education in the United States and plan to return to their native countries. A quick review of reasons to seek foreign students notes that institutions should not do so without investigating the problems and additional duties that a foreign student program may entail. Also discussed are the diverse reasons why institutions seek international students; these range from financial gain to enriched experiences for the native students, to fostering an "international" education. A discussion of the politics and resources involved in a recruitment program offers suggestions for developing institutional readiness for the program. A further section discusses the practicalities and processes of recruitment and admissions including legal issues, communication, information and research, timing and transportation, and values. Also examined is the hosting of special programs and groups of international students. Two final sections offer resources for international recruiting (both passive and active strategies) and resources for international student retention (academically appropriate students, language skills, support services, and integration into the community). (JB)

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Issues in the Recruitment and Retention of International Students by Academic Programs in the United States

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"International" Defined

For the purposes of this discussion, "international" will be used to refer to students on non-immigrant visas, the students who used to be referred to as "foreign students." These students maintain their citizenship and residency in countries other than the United States and do not plan to become either permanent residents or citizens of the United States.

Before focusing on recruitment and retention of non-immigrant students, it seems important to take a moment to think about the other students that some institutions call "international" both to clarify purposes and to hint at another area of recruitment and retention not often given enough attention by U.S. higher education. Many institutions, especially those in urban areas, have students that they still think of as "foreign" or "international" who are in actuality permanent residents of the United States. Generally, these non-foreign international students are either refugees or immigrants. Because "refugees" have left their homes as the result of political or economic disasters, they are as a group poorer and have more fragile ties to the United States than do "immigrants" who have chosen to come here and who have been required to have the financial resources to support themselves and their families when they arrive. This difference can be illustrated by contrasting the situations of refugees from Haiti, Vietnam, South Africa, or Poland to those of immigrants from Korea, Great Britain, Columbia, or Taiwan.

In addition to refugees and immigrants, some urban institutions are finding themselves with significant numbers of students whose parents are long-term non-immigrant residents; the children of numerous international business and government representatives are seeking at least part of their education in the United States.

However, wherever they come from and whatever their status here, these young people now attending U.S. high schools and matriculating into U.S. colleges and universities: The difficulty for tertiary institutions arises from the relatively poor linguistic skills of non-native speakers of English who graduate from U.S. high schools in contrast to those of international students educated outside the U.S. These U.S. high school graduates have many of the problems in reading and writing that have led to the creation of developmental skills programs for native speakers of English, problems that are compounded by their being non-native speakers of English whose understanding of U.S. culture has been intense but narrow.

To return to where we started: this discussion is not about resident students but about foreign students who seek their educations in the U.S. and plan to return to their native countries. Thus, our basic questions include the following:

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

1. Why would a U.S. college or university actively seek international students?

2. Once an institution has decided to recruit international students, how does it do it?

3. Having gotten the interest of an international student, how does an institution decide whether or not to admit him or her?

4. What are the implications of admission of an international student? What promises has an institution made to that student by the act of admitting him or her?

5. Before bringing a large group of international students to a campus for a special program, what preparations should an institution make?

6. What resources are available to help an institution seek appropriate students in a cost-effective manner?

Reasons for Seeking International Students

In these days of reduced enrollments and an aging U.S. population, some struggling institutions have sought international students as a way of making up for short falls in their U.S. enrollment. In some extreme instances, colleges have been bought or heavily subsidized by Japanese companies that plan to bring over numbers of Japanese students for the field trip of a lifetime. Since financial security for all institutions is tied to a large extent to the maintenance of adequate enrollment, we must be careful not to patronize these institutions and their administrators. At the same time, we should acknowledge the problems that they have brought on themselves, for in trying to solve one set of problems they have often created another equally difficult set.

Institutions with a handful of international students can be lulled into thinking that these students are "just like other students." When the percentage of international students increases, administrators, faculty, and U.S. students quickly find out just how different people from other cultures can be both in their everyday behaviors and in their expectations about the purposes and methods of higher education. At the same time, stress on staff increases because of the increasing demands made by the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Even in times of financial distress, administrators and faculty members should carefully prepare for the significant changes in an institution--its purposes as well as its activities--before bringing to their educational community large numbers of strangers from strange lands.

Internationalization of the Campus and Curriculum

Many institutions seek international students for reasons that combine financial with educational gain. One of the current themes from professional organizations and from college and university presidents is the importance of "internationalization" of the campus and the curriculum. The basic motivation for this effort lies in the realization that the U.S. cannot be economically or politically successful in the 21st century if our citizens cannot see how their lives and work are influenced by forces from outside the U.S. Moreover, the U.S. itself is becoming ever more diverse in the cultural backgrounds of its citizens; awareness of the influences of cultural backgrounds on individual as well as group actions and emotions will be a key ingredient in everyday life, influencing the success of businesses, educational institutions, and all branches of the government.

The definition of the term "internationalization" clearly changes from institution to institution: an agricultural or technical school is often thinking about projects overseas through the Agency for International Development while a more traditional liberal arts institution wants to increase the numbers of students participating in study abroad activities. The types of activities that are encouraged include:

1. development activities overseas funded through the U.S. government;

2. study abroad for U.S. students;

3. research and study opportunities for faculty;

4. addition of international affairs courses to the curriculum, especially in Political Science;

5. addition of an international focus to the curriculum across the board so that all students learn to see their study and professions in a more international context; and

6. many institutions define internationalization to include the recruiting of international students to study on their campuses.

Recruitment and Admission of International Students: Politics and Resources

Research has shown that most U.S. colleges and universities have received international students into their programs without really thinking about what they were doing (Goodwin and Nacht 1983). In these institutions, students are self-selected, coming to the institution through the accident of relatives or friends previously having stumbled across the institution. Or, a faculty member might have met a student or his/her family while traveling overseas.

Starting in the 1980s, more and more institutions have developed plans for the recruiting of international students, seeking balanced representation from numerous countries, appropriate students, and consistent enrollment. Moreover, many graduate programs have been seeking high quality students for programs in scientific and technical areas.

However, as the 1990s began (and the U.S. moved from the exuberance of the 1980s to the nervousness of the 1990s), many institutions began to experience significant reductions in resources--and have as a result been forced to set priorities for the use of the remaining resources. Before setting out on an extensive program of international recruitment, administrators must now consider the emotionally and politically explosive issue of possible conflict between the "internationalization" and "diversification" of the institution. In some contexts, the issue is stated in terms of potential conflicts between international and multicultural goals of an institution: "international" being the cover term for "foreign students and faculty" with "multicultural" being the cover term for "minority students and faculty." In the southern U.S., we are accustomed to thinking of minority as referring to African-American students and faculty; in other regions of the U.S., students and faculty of Hispanic and Asian backgrounds are less-than-pleased if resources seem to be diverted from their programs to support programs for non-U.S. citizens.

It is not necessarily true that international programs are in conflict with multicultural programs. Foreign students and faculty can be included in the diversification of an institution. On the other hand, it is not necessarily true that international students and faculty have much in common with minority students and faculty. Terms like African-American, Chinese-American, Italian-American are useful indicators of origin and cultural subgroupings within the U.S.; they are not helpful if they are taken to mean that there is much in the way of cultural convergence or need for institutional services between African-Americans and citizens of Ghana, or between Chinese-Americans and Chinese from the People's Republic of China, or of Italian-Americans with modern-day Romans.

That is, administrators should not dash into a program of internationalization just because everybody else seems to be doing it or because it seems to be good for the students to know about the wider world. Faculty, students, and the institution's community need to be included in discussion of the importance of internationalization for them. Without careful consideration of the political and social issues, administrators can find themselves in the situation of being accused of misuse of institutional resources on programs that are not part of the mission of the institution.

Thus, prior to development of a plan for recruitment of international students, an administrator would be wise to carry out a program to clarify the international goals and roles of the institution:

1. the faculty and administration must decide on proper international goals for the institution;

2. students, too, should be included in discussions about the importance of international activities and about ways in which international students can be integrated into the academic and social life of students at that institution;

3. staff in the student services programs of the institution should be included since they would have significant responsibilities in the internationalization process; and

4. these international goals should then be incorporated into the institution's mission statement.

At the same time that goals are being discussed, the administrators and staff members should be realistic about the reallocation of resources necessary to achieve the goals.

Recruitment and Admission of International Students: Practicalities and Processes

Marketing theory tells us that the basic marketing situation involves someone with a product to sell and another someone with the funds and the desire to buy the product. Marketing, then, is the activities that bring these two people together. In order to achieve that exchange, we must devise strategies to bridge the gap between the two, dealing with problems in communication, information, timing, values, transportation, and the legalities of the transfer of property. International marketing of an institution seems to include many of the same activities as domestic marketing activities but with all steps requiring skills and knowledge beyond that demanded by the domestic scene.

Legal Issues

Before taking even the first step toward developing materials and processes, the institution should seek expert advice on the regulations of the Immigration and Naturalization Service that control the admission of foreign students into the United States. It should be noted that INS permission to bring students for degree programs is separate from such permission to bring students to the U.S. for fulltime English study. An institution that already has permission to have foreign students in its degree programs will need to discuss with INS the rules that govern the admission and education of students in fulltime English programs. Once INS matters have been dealt with, then the marketing of the institution can proceed.

Communication

Many of the actions taken to recruit international students are similar to those taken for U.S. students. Brochures are written, printed, and distributed. Institutional representatives visit high school classes and college-career day fairs and festivals. Admission steps and forms are developed and implemented. Inquiries from potential students are received and answered. Qualified students are admitted.

To communicate effectively with potential students living overseas, the institution will need to develop for this new audience program descriptions and documents to use in the

international application process. Differences in these materials and processes arise from the institution's attempt to present itself to a new market of students (and parents) whose understanding of U.S. higher education is limited. In order to present itself effectively, an institution with limited experience in marketing to international students would benefit from participation in the conferences and other activities of NAFSA: Association of International Educators, especially those provided by international admissions officers but also those involving ESL program administrators and study abroad specialists.

The range of practical considerations include such issues as the language used in brochures and on application forms. All written materials need to be edited carefully by a staff member sensitive to cultural differences and to language that is overly complex or too full of unexplained terminology. Application forms need to be designed to be answered easily by a foreigner with limited English; they should seek only essential information.

Information and Research

Admission criteria need to be set that will bring only qualified and appropriate students to the institution. In order to carry out this objective, admissions personnel will require training and resource materials to use in interpreting foreign credentials. Consideration will need to be given to the academic background necessary for an international student to succeed at the institution. In addition to the obvious requirement that the student have adequate English or that the institution be able to provide language training, academic preparation also means that the student's background be appropriate for the institution's programs: for example, a student with a "business" degree might actually have had preparation in what used to be called "secretarial science" rather than in business administration. Such a student could have excellent English and yet fail because of inappropriate academic preparation. Additionally, institutions often require that international students have higher grade point averages than domestic students; international undergraduates might be required to have had a "B" average in high school while U.S. students with a "C" are admissible. This requirement prevents an institution from bringing to the U.S. students with significant potential for academic failure.

Timing and Transportation

All of these activities will take longer and involve the sending of materials and people from one country to another. Application deadlines, for only one example, need to be set so that a newly admitted student would have a realistic chance of arriving at the institution in time for the beginning of the academic term. Students will need advice about getting themselves from their country to the university campus: one confused young Japanese ended up in Jacksonville, Florida, rather than Jacksonville, Alabama, because of a miscommunication with the admission staff in Alabama.

Values

In marketing, discussions of values center on differences between the evaluation of the product being sold between the seller and the potential buyer. Sellers see the product in terms of what has been put into it; buyers see it in terms of its utility for themselves. Differences in perception about the purposes and value of higher education can confuse communication with international students. For many Japanese students, a degree from the U.S. is not especially valuable but learning English and having an American experience is highly desired. In contrast, for many students from other parts of Asia, a degree from a recognized institution in the U.S. can be the first step on the road to financial success. The presentation of an institution and its programs would need to be considered in light of the types of students sought and the values that those students put on higher education in general and U.S. higher education in particular.

Hosting of Special Programs and Groups of International Students: Horror Stories Created and Avoided

Administrators are advised to be especially cautious about allowing their campuses to be the sites for special programs aimed at students from one particular country. Such programs might include, for example, the bringing of Japanese students to the campus for a summer program. Other such programs are funded by foreign governments to send groups of their technical people to campuses for special training, Saudi Arabian meteorologists in one instance. Such programs can put the institution and its community under special strain and have all too often turned into nightmares for administrators.

Groups of ten or more human beings from any one culture can take on a special life as a group, especially if they are together for much of the day, living together in the dormitory, studying together in classes, going on field trips together, eating together, and hanging out around town together. These groups are more visible on campus and less easily integrated into the accustomed ways of living on that campus and in that community.

In planning such programs, the administrators should be aware that greed or financial desperation are dangerous motives for venturing into the international arena. Honest answers should be given to questions such as the following about the institution's ability to carry out the program:

1. Does it have appropriate education or training programs?

2. Does the institution have the human resources to carry out the program?

3. Does it have adequate physical resources?

4. How will the students fit into the local community, and how supportive will that community be for the institution's plan?

The most important question to ask has to do with the institution's academic programs. A wise administrator will seek only programs that have a close fit with the institution's experience and interests. Even if an institution could create a special program using temporary staff, the administrator should think twice about such programs. If they bring inappropriate students to the campus, problems are created for the institution's regular students, faculty, and staff. If they create a program of less than adequate quality, the reputation of the institution will suffer overseas--and in the U.S.

The human resources for a special program include faculty to teach the courses and provide other training. In addition to teachers and to administrative support, staff will be needed to carry out advising, counseling, social programs and orientation for the students. The more disparate the culture of the students from that of the institution the more staff time will be needed to ensure the success of the program. Special programs do not provide just the five or six hours each day of courses but must consider what will happen in the lives of the students for the other 18 or 19 hours each day they are in the program. A bored group of young people from another culture can get itself into a lot of trouble if not given appropriate and adequate outlets for their social needs.

Special attention must be given to orientation for residence hall personnel, including housekeepers. Many programs have found it helpful to have a counselor who lives in the residence hall with the students, helping them organize social activities and advising them on emotional problems resulting from culture shock. This person serves as the program's contact person into the group, spotting and dealing with problems before they become serious.

Special programs also make demands on an institution's space. Urban institution's without residence halls can have difficulty developing affordable programs. Institution's with limited classroom space might have trouble giving the program rooms during appropriate times of day.

Groups of students from foreign countries must not be brought into a community without careful preparation of the citizens of the community for the group. The people need to understand why these newcomers are in their community. Information needs to be distributed about the students' country and their purposes in coming to the United States. Community leaders need to be consulted and to be involved in welcoming and social activities. Even the police need to be forewarned so that they have a contact person in case of problems. Generally, the smaller the community, the more careful the planning needs to be.

Resources for International Recruiting

The following list of resources was developed by Joann Stedman, a leader in the development of ethical and effective recruitment programs used by major institutions in the United States. Stedman (personal communication, 1990) divides recruitment activities into "passive" and "active" modes.

Passive Recruiting Activities

Passive recruitment focuses on low-cost activities that can be done without international recruiting trips:

1. Get the most out of the current pool of applicants. Inquiries should be handled as quickly and as personally as possible. Remember these potential students have already learned something about your institution and can be reached with relatively inexpensive recruiting efforts.

2. Review your publications, and revise them as necessary to fit an international audience. This review should include decisions about the costs of mailing materials overseas. A balance must be struck between refusing to send students important information and sending them more than they want or need.

3. Learn about the most cost effective methods for mailing materials overseas. Allow extra time in the recruiting cycle so that materials can be sent in the least expensive manner.

4. Develop an international mailing list to include advising centers and institutions that will receive information on a regular basis. There are no such lists for purchase that will meet every institution's needs. Moreover such a list can be developed relatively easily using the following resources:

a. names and addresses of schools from which your current applicants are coming,
b. College Board CEEB code lists which contain names and addresses of many international schools,
c. Directory of Overseas Educational Advising Center (College Board Publications, Box 866, NY NY 10106), and
d. mailing lists of overseas schools and other useful contacts for purchase from Linden Educational Services, 5612 Wilson Lane, Bethesda, MD 20814 (301-986-5687).

5. Currently enrolled, satisfied international students may be an institution's best recruiting tools. These students can be asked to make recommendations on ways that other students could learn about the institution. They have in some institutions been involved in recruiting campaigns by

a. paying visits to schools while at home on vacations,

b. writing letters to potential students,

c. answering inquiries from potential students, and

d. helping with the revision of publications.

Active Recruitment

Active recruiting requires the development of a base of knowledge about international education worldwide and a commitment of funding for international recruiting trips. Stedman's suggestions for active recruitment include the following:

1. Developing a plan for research about international recruiting is fundamentally important for successful recruiting because of the information that such research provides about this new market. Research could include study of publications and participation in meetings and conferences on international programming. The research plan must also include distribution of the information throughout the institution so that leaders share a body of knowledge about the international market.

2. Consideration should be given to having an admissions specialist participate in an overseas recruiting trip. Travel can either be with a group or individual. Group travel provides the recruiter with training about recruiting in this new context as well as contacts for future communication. On the other hand, individual travel might provide an institution with a higher profile, but such recruiting should be done by an experienced admissions officer. The following contacts are recommended by Stedman:

a. Linden Educational Services (Asia, Latin America, Europe, sometimes the Middle East): Linda Heaney, President; 5612 Wilson Lane; Bethesda, MD 20814; 301-9986-5687.

b. College Information Exchange/CIE (Latin America), International Student Exchange/ISCE (Asia), or European Council of International Schools/ECIS (Europe). Information available through the College Board, Office of International Education, 1717 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Suite 402, Washington, DC 20036, 202-332-1480.

3. Faculty, staff, and students should be given information about the recruiting activities and should be used in the process. For example, faculty can take information overseas when attending international conferences or participating in study abroad activities. Such recruiting should include training for the participants to the ethical issues involved in discussing the institution.

Resources for Retention of International Students

As in the recruitment of domestic students, having a student register for his/her first term is only the first stage in developing a stable international student enrollment at the institution. Disappointed or otherwise unhappy students move on to other institutions, and they communicate with family members and friends about their negative impressions of the institution and its community.

Academically Appropriate Students

Retention of international students involves at least the following:

1. The selection of appropriate students is the most critical requirement for retention. The marketing plan for the institution must be based on rigorous honesty about the academic offerings available at the institution. The most popular fields of study for international students are business, engineering, and computer science. Few are interested in traditional liberal arts education.

An appropriate match must exist between the educational level of the student's prior study and that expected at the institution. Other countries have educational systems quite different from that in the United States. The admissions community invests enormous time and energy in investigation and communication about other systems to help U.S. institutions make accurate evaluations of a student's educational preparation.

Appropriate English Language Skills

Appropriateness also includes being sure that each student has the necessary English skills for academic success. The table on the following page show the results of a survey by the Educational Testing Service on the uses of TOEFL scores by U.S. institutions (ETS 1990:9). ETS notes

> Of 324 respondents, only 6 allow students to begin work with no restrictions when the TOEFL score is below 500. 3 of these were community colleges. 42 percent of undergraduate schools indicated a minimum of 525-550 as suitable for undergraduate admission with no ESL or work load restrictions.

Because of pressure to increase or maintain enrollments, some institutions have admitted students with inadequate English but have not provided the students with appropriate instruction. Significant differences exist between the level of language required for social interaction (for being a tourist or talking with an admissions officer) and the level needed for academic study. Students must be able to read and write academic English; they must be able to listen to lecture and take notes; they must develop vocabularies beyond the few hundred words that are used for everyday life.

In most situations, faculty in the English Department or in Developmental Studies are not prepared to be of help to international students who have English skills much below that represented by 500 on TOEFL. The placement of non-native speaking students into classes that are not planned for them can result in three difficulties for an institution: (1) The student is not getting the education that admission should have provided; the institution has not lived up to the contract implied in the admission of a student with less-than-adequate English. (2) The teacher of such a class is put in the nearly untenable possible of trying to develop a whole new profession over night and without adequate resources (3) The U.S. students in the class struggle with a classmate who cannot adequately communicate with them, participate in class activities, or carry his/her own load of group work.

Appropriate On-Campus Support Services

2. Retention of international students will also depend on the appropriateness of the services provided to meet their very particular needs. Someone must handle all of the Immigration papers correctly so that the student remains in a legal status. Someone must provide advising and counseling to help international students deal with the effects of culture shock. Someone must provide U.S. students with advising and counseling on cultural differences so that they can help the foreign students participate more fully in the social and cultural life of the institution. Suitcase campuses are especially difficult for international students who are left alone on an abandoned campus weekend after weekend. Most international students are from major metropolitan areas--Tokyo, Cairo, Caracas, Mexico City. For these students, small town life can quickly pall unless the institution has developed a program of activities to supplement attending class and studying.

Having international students on a campus does not mean that there will be significant contact between them and the institution's U.S. students. The international students will generally be focused intently on their academic work and will be ignorant of strategies to use to form friendships with Americans. At the same time, their U.S. peers frequently have little experience of people who are culturally and linguistically different.

Use of TOEFL Scores by U.S. Colleges and Universities

Institutional Policy	Score Range	Percent Responding
Begin academic work with no restrictions at undergraduate level.	500-547 550-600	38% 59%
Begin academic work with no restrictions at graduate level.	500-547 550-600	18% 77%
Begin undergraduate work with no restriction in selected fields not requiring high verbal ability (engineering, agriculture, etc.).	500-547 550-600	51% 43%
Begin graduate work with no restrictions in selected fields (engineering, math, chemistry, etc.).	550-547 550-600	33% 64%
Begin academic work with initial limitation on academic load and with some supplemental English instruction.	450-497 500-547 550-600	13% 62% 24%
Begin academic work if strong in all aspects except English proficiency; at least half-time ESL and corresponding reduction in academic load.	450-497 500-547 550-600	28% 53% 18%
Be referred to full-time ESL program.	450-497 500-547 550-600	42% 41% 5%

Indeed, intercultural communication specialists assure us that the first stage of contact between people from different cultures is a difficult one: cultures in contact are cultures in

conflict (Brislin 1981; Robinson 1985). The institution's administration, faculty, and staff must plan to mediate these differences and conflict through creative program design that leads to productive communication between international students and domestic students. Generally, it seems that students overcome their differences most easily when they are all working together toward some goal or on some project that they all care about more than they care about hating each other.

Integration into the Community

3. A fit between community and international student is an important part of retention. In small cities and smaller towns, international students are going to be immediately and continuously visible. If the institution can work with community leaders to make the students feel welcome, then students are more likely to want to stay at the institution. After all, finding a new school and learning to live in a new place is a daunting prospect to most students. If they can quickly feel at home in their new community, they are more likely to suffer through the initial pains of cultural adjustment and to main at the institution. In should be understood, however, that few communities have dealt well with significant numbers of students from a single country. The worst cases have been small rural communities with large numbers of Iranians at the time of the Iranian crisis. Similar disturbances have occurred with large numbers of young men from Arabic countries dropped into small towns without adequate preparation either of the community or the young men.

Conclusion

International students represent both opportunities and problems for a U.S. college or university and its community. Without careful planning and supervision, institutions can damage their own reputations and make "international" or "foreign" dirty words in their communities and to their U.S. students. Perhaps more importantly, poorly conceived and executed international recruiting robs the international students, striping them of dreams as well as of money. With careful planning and supervision, international students can enrich the life of the institution and gain for themselves valuable educational and cultural skills.

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